

Nathaniel Macon to Andrew Jackson, September 25, 1833, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

NATHANIEL MACON TO JACKSON.

Buck Spring, N. C., September 25, 1833.

Sir, Your letter of the 2d instant was received on the 20, and would have been answered sooner, but company prevented. I have read it and the documents inclosed over and over again, they have not changed my opinion as to the right of a State to secede. if this opinion be erroneous, it is of long standing and will probably go with me, to the grave. that South Carolina ought to have pursued a different course, was never doubted, but her doings, cannot take away the right of other states, or destroy her own. The first convention of North Carolina rejected the Constitution, the legislature called a second, which ratified, she had the same right to have called a third and that might if it thought proper have rejected it again; South Carolina could not have been in the Union under the operation of her acts, she would have been what North Carolina was before she adopted the constitution, a foreign power; The same feeling, which caused North Carolina to adopt, would have operated on South Carolina not to leave the union; The word Union has a force more powerful than fleets or armies.

Nine states as well as I recollect, might have carried the federal constitution into operation, leaving four under the confederation, if they thought proper, to continue under it. Yet the confederation was not to be altered without the consent of every State. The union will not be weakened by the right to secede, it is one that will not be abused, because it cannot be the interest of one to abuse it, but if unjust legislation, should force a state to secede, that would not be an abuse, but if a state should secede with or without cause, she cannot

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get into it again by her own act. If a territory would not be a state, she could not be forced to be one, she could not be forced to be a member of the union as a state, without her consent, so that force cannot be used to bring a territory into the union or to keep a state in it.

When the federal and state governments differ, the people must decide which they will obey, without being guilty of treason, without this they must commit it against one or the other, a horrid choice, whether to be hung by the sheriff or the marshal. A conquered country is at the mercy of the conqueror, no rights but what he pleases to give. The conquest of South Carolina would put her out of the union, and she would not be a Territory, with a right to come into it. Permit me, to observe, that I have constantly thought and often said, that the proclamation and nullification, ought to be laid by, as unfit for use in the united states. to nullify and be in the Union and to be conquered and be in the union, seem to be impossible.

I never kept a copy, but of one letter I ever wrote, that was a private one, not connected with public affairs. of course I have no copy of the answer to Mr. Carson's letter, nor have I seen it in print, though I have been told it was in his circular to his constituents, it contained my opinion when wrote. In speaking of the proclamation, I mean that part which relates to State rights.

The opinion, that a state cannot secede, seems to me, like the old British doctrine, once a subject always a subject, and that a conquered state would not be unlike Ireland; one of the most excellent and happy parts of our form of government is that either state or individual may leave it, when they please, our double government cannot be kept together by force, if they can the condition of unhappy Ireland must be the fate of a conquered state.

I live 12 miles from Warrenton. I mention this, to account for the delay in the receipt of your letters, and scarcely ever go or send there. You will perceive, that I have endeavored

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not to repeat the contents of my former letter. I do not yet recollect enough of the Massachusetts case, to say a word about it. That your life may be as happy and contented as it has been prosperous and brilliant is the sincere wish of Sir

Yr. friend and Hble Sevt

[*Indorsement in Jackson's handwriting:*] Mr. Macon—on the subject of the proclamation. To be carefully filed. A.J.

It is evidence of weakness—his votes and speech in 1808 and 9, in support of the laws to enforce the embargo. he voted for the bloody bill then—it was treason to resist the laws by force—it was treason to secede. preserve this for history. A.J.